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ABSTRACT

James Bryant Conant's book, "The Education of America" (1963), triggered a major change in physical education curricula. Formerly a (sports) skills and applied techniques oriented discipline, physical education has expanded to areas such as kinesiology and sports sociology. However, performance and performance courses are still an important aspect of the college curriculum of physical education majors. Questions about the role of this aspect of physical education concern: 1) degree and number of actual performance skills and abilities; 2) appropriate entry standards of performance competence for majors; 3) the possibility of structuring performance courses so that they are pursued apart from professional application; 4) the relationship between professional education, disciplinary study, and performance courses; and 5) the roles of faculty responsible for performance courses. (CJ)

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SIX SIGNIFICANT QUESTIONS ABOUT PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMANCE COURSES IN THE MAJOR*

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by

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It is time to look afresh for common ground in physical education. Since 1963 change has occurred with rapid-fire frequency in physical education. During such periods of rapid change a field's common demoninator can itself become sub-divided. Increasing specialization, splinter groups, and fragmentation of the field in general have become characteristics. It was in 1963 that James Bryant Conant's book, The Education of American Teachers, appeared. Conant's challenges to physical education were twofold. The first challenge triggered a major change and received all of the limelight. Conant suggested that physical education consisted of only (sport) skills and applied techniques. He doubted aloud whether physical education possessed unique scientific and scholarly subject matter.

Beginning with Franklin Henry's now classic paper, responses to Conant from people in physical education multiplied. These scholars claimed that Conant was wrong, and that there was an academic discipline for physical education. Once this claim for a discipline was accepted, the floodgates for change in physical education were opened. Examples abound, but one is sufficient. In 1963, we were all from departments of physical education. We called each other physical educators. Today, by contrast, our departments carry a variety of labels. These labels vary from Kinesiology, to Sport Studies to big league tongue twisters such as Kinathropology. Physical education also endures like Mom's apple pie, hot dogs and Chevrolet. Moreover, some of us now take offense at being called a physical educator; we prefer to think of ourselves as sport sociologists or kinesiotherapists or kinesiologists. Indeed, some of our colleagues

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even question the extent to which any performance courses are necessary in these newly-named departments and degree programs. In sum, this example of changes between 1963 and 1980, and the others which could also be cited, point to the need to search anew for common ground in the field.

Interestingly enough, Conant in 1963 pointed to basis for common ground. He pointed to performance in physical and play activities as common ground in physical education. Conant in fact lumped together music, art and physical education because he viewed them as performance-based fields. We agree, and take this assumption as a point of departure.

Yet, it was also in relation to performance and performance courses that Conant issued his second challenge. Performance competence, said Conant, resulted from the total youthful experience in which he included the public schools (p. 183). Conant then drew three conclusions on performance and performance courses in the major. These were: (1) performance fundamentals should not be included in separate university courses because these fundamentals were part of the public school curriculum and the total youthful experience; (2) Therefore, beginning performance competence should be pre-requisite to entry into higher education; (3) Departments of physical education should, thus, implement proficiency examinations to assess the performance competence of in-coming students. Although this second challenge of Conant's did not receive the same attention as that about the discipline, there are indications that this second challenge can no longer be ignored.

Ironically enough, the performance question has been made all-the-more significant because of the development of a discipline in response to Conant's first challenge. From our scientific analyses of performance we have identified the variables which co-vary with performance mastery. We have technologies which stem from science in the form of ergogenic aids and instructional hardware. Within human limits we have the capacity to increase performance levels to new heights. Further, we can amass a wealth of literature about the experience of performing. We can talk intelligently about the differences between humans and animals on the matter of performance. Finally, we know that there is no substitute for the actual experience of performing if a complete understanding of performance is the target. Like opposite sides of a coin, both qualitative and quantitive features join to make it possible to truly understand performance. It follows that this new storehouse of knowledge about performance must be used when we look afresh at performance

and performance courses with an eye toward common ground.

There is a popular poster, one which includes a frustrated ape, with a telling caption. "Just when I had life's answers," the caption reads, "they changed the questions!" With this same spirit, let us look for the right questions about performance and performance courses, instead of the right answers. Since the answers we claim to have are always determined by the questions we ask, question-raising, rather than answer-giving is, important. We wish to raise for you six questions about performance and performance courses in the major and to highlight the significance of each.

The first question is: Must each student in an undergraduate major program possess actual performance skills and abilities in more than one activity? This is not a neutral question. It might have been phrased in a neutral form as: Should undergraduate majors be required to posses any actual performance skills and abilities? This latter question may seem ridiculous in a field such as physical education; but it is only a ridiculous question if a first order assumption is accepted. It must be assumed, as we have, that physical education by any name is a performance-based field. Thus, the first order question is not whether performance competence, but how much, when, and why.

Such a question about performance competence was easier to answer in 1963. Then a major meant only a major for teaching. Today, with many career streams added, the answers are not so easy to supply. In teaching there was direct applicability of performance skill to the role in the schools. By contrast, in the new career streams, it is disciplinary knowledge, more often than performance skill, which must be applied as part of work roles. The problem of how much performance competence is equally significant in liberal arts degree programs and in the pre-graduate education of our field's prospective scholars.

Yet, even in the case of teachers and teaching performance competence merits a re-examination, and then for many reasons. For one, instructional technologies are now available which make it possible for students to learn without hands-on instruction or demonstration by a teacher. For another, there are so many activities included in today's public school programs that it is nearly impossible for a single student to possess competence in all of them. More to the point, arguments for breadth of exposure to many activities versus depth in one or a few must be re-examined. The argument for breadth, after all, rests upon

breadth in schools. Enter Conant. Undergraduates completed school programs, so why ask them to repeat performance courses in the same activities which were part of their schools? If school programs are faulty, where is the ultimate blame to be placed? Who prepared high school teachers? Is mere exposure to many activities, then, an adequate preparation for teaching? The point is, performance and performance courses are not part of an open-and-shut case when it comes to teachers and teaching, either.

The first question about how much performance leads to a second, and this was suggested by Conant. What entry standards for performance competence are appropriate for the major? It is one thing to state that there might be fewer and different competencies which are part of an undergraduate major. It is a different, yet related question to consider pre-requisites for entry into the major in a performance-based field. Consider sister fields. In music, an audition is customary before a student is allowed entry into the major. In art, a student's work is also reviewed. Assessments in both fields are not directed toward breadth of exposure to many activities or instruments. They are usually directed toward one and no more than two forms. Further, because performance is assessed upon entry, performance courses which are offered in the undergraduate majors begin at level II or above, instead of at the beginning level. Courses are highly specialized for the pursuit of excellence. There is, then, a distinction between high school work and that in higher education.

The corollary questions follow for physical education. What performance standards should be pre-requisite to entry into the major? Is performance competence to be assessed quantitatively, or is a qualitative assessment in order, too? Are entry standards to be the same for all students, regardless of career stream or degree program? Clearly these questions are related to the first one about the degree and kind of performance competence.

The relationship between the first and the second question can be illustrated by an example. Suppose that performance skill at level II is required in only one activity in the major. Suppose as well that by means of a proficiency examination, a student demonstrates such skill upon entry into the major. Here we have the makings of a revolutionary change in physical education; in the case of this example the student can complete the major without taking a single performance course! This exemplary case signals the implications of our decisions. Are we ready to accept such a development? Can we, acknowledge that what was

once restricted to high education should filter down to high schools and is now pre-requisite to it? The point is, we in higher education must determine regularly whether performance offerings are structured on the basis of turf protectionism or curricular necessity.

There is a third question about performance which stems from the common practice of combining performance in an activity with methods and materials of teaching the activity. This third question is: Why not structure performance courses to allow performance to be pursued apart from professional application? The significance of this question is difficult to over-emphasize. Reflect again upon the pattern in other performance-based fields. In music, art, and drama, performance is pursued for its own sake early in the major. Only later, do professional or applied concerns enter into the picture. This pattern is more easilty accepted in other fields because they offer a degree program which we in physical education do not. In these other fields, the student may be prepared to be a performing artist, and this preparation requires performance mastery quite apart from a professional mission. Performing artists also enjoy course experience which exist apart from service or basic instructional programs. So long as physical education has been defined strictly as a teaching field, any analogy in this regard has been strained. Now that physical education is being re-defined, however, the analogy approaches the realm of possibility. From course one in the major all the way to an undergraduate degree, it ought to be possible to pursue performance without any specific career in mind. Students might, in short, pursue excellence in their own performance, like the performing artists in other fields.

There is added significance to performance apart from professional missions. Here the stage has been set by scholars who study play and play behaviors. The quality of the experience accorded the student varies as a function of the course. For example, a required course which combines performance skill with methods and materials of teaching is different in degree and kind from a course where performance competence is pursued by itself and voluntarily. The studies on play and play behavior make it abundantly clear that the participant's motive, the participant's control over the structure and conduct of the activity, and the features of the performance environment all influence, if not determine, which meanings will be derived by the participant. Thus, the outcomes and meanings which are associated with play are not automatic. Our performance courses cannot escape our scrutiny if these meanings are deemed important for our majors.

The third question leads logically to a fourth. What is the relationship between professional education and performance courses? A fifth question follows immediately: What is the relationship between disciplinary study and performance courses? Once again, the pattern in other performance-based fields is revealing. Teaching in these other fields provides a visible example. Performance mastery comes first. Pedagogical concerns follow later because pedagogy deserves to be treated as a scientific and artistic totality, instead of being fractionated in many separate performance courses. Performance courses and disciplinary courses alike are, thus, pre-requisite to professional education. In professional education the application and manipulation of performance skill and disciplinary knowledge can be molded into an integrated package.

But to return to the fifth question, performance courses can also be linked to disciplinary courses. A certain measure of performance competence, however and where ever it is acquired, would appear to be pre-requisite to disciplinary coursework. Just as performance courses in art are bridges to art criticism, and performance courses in music bridges to music theory and composition, so too, can performance courses in physical education serve as bridges to performance analysis via disciplinary courses. In other words, performance courses provide the actual experience of performing, while disciplinary courses give a different kind of understanding of performance. The one gives knowledge of how to, the other, knowledge about. These two kinds of knowledge may be mutually exclusive, but surely an educated person in our field must have both. This link between performance and disciplinary courses is, thus, a bridge between C.P. Snow's Two Cultures. It is an aesthetic as well as a scientific and scholarly bridge.

The sixth and last question about performance and performance analysis in the major is: What are the roles of faculty who are charged with responsibility for performance courses? If professional missions are teased out of performance courses, then the roles and competencies of faculty change as well. Specialist faculty are required for performance courses. Faculty become in the strictist sense performance coaches. The fact that professors in other fields are known as voice coaches and drama coaches should not go unnoticed in this connection. Ideally, such a performance coach might be, or has been, a performing artist and is competent in performance analysis. Such a coach must also be a knowledgeable guide. This notion of a guide is important. Many major choreographic innovations in performance, it should be recalled, come not from coaches and scientists, but

from performers or athletes. Therefore, the concept of a guide is appropriate for a faculty member. Predictable trails are recommended by a guide but new performance trails can also be blazed by students. Such innovation in performance must be a central aim in a performance-based field.

These, then, are six major questions about the role of performance and performance courses in the major. To conclude, it is impossible to avoid the symbolism of Detroit's Renaissance Center. A Renaissance is, after all, a rebirth, a rediscovery of common ground; but it is also a rebirth set against a new back-drop. Certainly, the discipline and the profession have developed to the point where they create together such a new back-drop. Now a true Renaissance is due performance and performance courses in the major. It can be triggered by questions such as those raised today. Our answers which mark such a rebirth are crucial to a field concerned with the science and art of performance and with sport and dance as performing arts.